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## Letter dated 28 December 2000 from the Permanent Representative of the Gambia to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

Upon the instructions of my Government, I have been requested to inform you as follows:

Following the publication of the report of the Panel of Experts established by resolution 1306 (2000) that was presented to the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1132 (1997) concerning Sierra Leone, the Government of the Republic of The Gambia was stupefied by the allegations in the said report contained in document S/2000/1195, dated 20 December 2000.

The first and only communication referenced (S/AC.34/2000/PE/OC) received from the Panel of Experts, informed of the latter's mandate and mentioned of an assignment to compile information on the export and import of diamonds from countries in West Africa in order to determine historical trends. In the said correspondence, the Government of The Gambia was required to provide information on the total volume for rough and polished diamonds, by weight and value, for the period 1987-1999. The letter requested for the same, figures for the first half of 2000.

We had informed the Panel, and rightly so, that The Gambia did not mine diamonds and therefore could not as a State be involved in their export. Consequently, we could not provide any figures on the import and export of diamonds.

The Panel of Experts did not visit and hold consultations with the Gambian authorities on the authenticity or otherwise of any information that was available to it. In fact, in annex 2 to the Panel's report, the meetings and consultations with all the countries concerned were listed, with the exception of The Gambia. No request was addressed to the Government for a possible visit by the Panel. Under these circumstances one is left to wonder what the intentions of the Panel really are.

Despite these damaging and malicious allegations, The Gambia is of the strong view that the Panel should first of all visit the country and carry out thorough and proper investigations, as was done with other countries before reaching hasty conclusions, based on hearsay.

It is true that a lot of private Gambian citizens have been involved in the informal diamond trade, both in Sierra Leone and Angola. These activities dated

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well before even the independence of this country, particularly at the time when The Gambia and Sierra Leone were being administered under one protectorate.

While it is likely that diamonds may be transiting through The Gambia to other destinations, the Government has neither condoned nor involved itself in such transactions and consequently does not derive any revenue from this trade, either through taxes or otherwise. In fact, the report of the Panel of Experts on The Gambia has not established any direct link between the transit trade in diamonds and the rebel movement.

Considering The Gambia's stance in maintaining peace and stability within the subregion and in Africa, the country cannot be involved in any activity which could have direct effects and contribute to the procurement of arms and the encouragement of war. The Gambia, despite its meagre resources, will continue to do all to contribute to the search for an honourable solution to the Sierra Leonean crisis. The bonds uniting Sierra Leone and The Gambia (and they are many) dating back to time immemorial are too strong for such baseless allegations to undo. The number of Sierra Leonean refugees in The Gambia are a testimony to this.

In conclusion, the Government of The Gambia requires the Panel to withdraw its statement and indicate the dates on which the Panel of Experts could visit The Gambia, so that we could together inform the world that the allegations were unfounded.

I should therefore be most grateful if this letter could be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

*(Signed)* Baboucarr-Blaise Ismaila **Jagne**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative